

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3757

S E C R E T BANGKOK 8033

EXDIS

E. O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: MASS, TH

SUBJ: CAMBODIAN AND VIETNAMESE MAP AND MASF ASSETS

DEPT PASS INFO SECDEF AND CINCPAC

SUMMARY: DISPOSITION OF VIETNAMESE MASF ASSETS CONTINUES TO DOMINATE PUBLIC ATTENTION HERE, BUT RTG, ITS SPINE OBVIOUSLY STIFFENED BY THAI MILITARY, SEEMS TO HAVE PULLED ITSELF TOGETHER AND IS ADMITTING THAT ASSETS BELONG TO U.S. WHILE THIS TAKES SOME HEAT OFF, REMOVAL FROM THAILAND OF F-5'S, A-37'S, ETC., SHOULD CONTINUE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE CONSISTENT WITH SAFE HANDLING. OUTLOADING OPERATIONS WILL BE SUSPENDED DURING MEDIA VISIT TO UTAPAO OF SEVERAL HOURS DURATION MAY 6, AT INSISTENCE OF SUPREME COMMAND. END SUMMARY.

1. THE QUESTION OF DISPOSITION OF THE VIETNAMESE MASF ASSETS IN THAILAND, ALMOST ENTIRELY AIRCRAFT, CONTINUES TO DOMINATE THE HEADLINES HERE. HANOI AND THE PRG ARE USING THESE ASSETS TO APPLY PRESSURE, EXPLOITING OF CLEARLY EMERGENT THAI DESIRE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM. ACCORDING TO PRESS, FOREIGN MINISTER OF PRG HAS SENT NOTE TO THAI FOREIGN MINISTER LAYING CLAIM TO VIETNAMESE MASF ASSETS BROUGHT TO THAILAND. THIS DEMAND, ACCORDING PRESS, WAS REINFORCED BY A RENEWED INTERVENTION FROM HANOI, WHICH REPORTEDLY HAS "FORMALLY REQUESTED" RETURN OF PLANES BY THAILAND TO SOUTH VIETNAM, POINTING

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OUT THAT ISSUE COULD AFFECT BANGKOK-HANOI RELATIONS.

SIDE BY SIDE WITH THIS STORY ON FRONT PAGE OF BANGKOK
"THE NATION" IS REPORT THAT THAI NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
IS RECOMMENDING IMMEDIATE THAI RECOGNITION OF NORTH VIETNAM
AND HINTING THAT RECOGNITION OF THE NEW REGIME IN
SAIGON IS ALSO IMMINENT.

2. DESPITE THESE DEVELOPMENTS, RTG SEEMS TO HAVE PULLED ITSELF
TOGETHER AND DECIDED TO SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE ON

ISSUE OF DISPOSITION OF VN MASF ASSETS. PRIME MINISTER
KUKRIT PRAMOT TOLD THE PRESS YESTERDAY THAT THAILAND
WOULD "HAND OVER" THESE ASSETS TO THE U.S. WHILE A FINAL
DECISION ON THAILAND'S POSITION TOWARDS THESE ASSETS IS
REPORTEDLY TO BE MADE AT A CABINET MEETING TUESDAY, MAY 6,
IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THE THAI MILITARY, THROUGH SUPREME
COMMAND, HAS SUCCEEDED IN SUPPRESSING FOR THE MOMENT ANY
CONSIDERATION OF HANDING OVER VIETNAMESE OR
CAMBODIAN ASSETS TO NEW COMMUNIST REGIMES. IN ACHIEVING
THIS RESULT, SUPREME COMMAND WAS UNDOUBTEDLY GIVEN A KEY
INSTRUMENT IN THE FORM OF OUR DECISION TO OFFER CONSIDERABLE
ASSETS TO THE THAI. AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, WE CONVEYED
NEWS OF THIS TO KRIANGSAK IMMEDIATELY UPON RECEIPT OF
AUTHORITY FROM WASHINGTON.

3. DISPOSITION OF THE FORMER VIETNAMESE ASSETS IS LIKELY
TO REMAIN A CONTENTIOUS ISSUE HERE. IF HANOI AND SAIGON
REACT SHARPLY, THOSE THAI WHO ARE PRESSING MOST URGENTLY
TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THEM CAN BE EXPECTED TO BELABOR
THE RTG HEAVILY. THE RTG, WHILE WE EXPECT IT TO STICK TO
ITS CURRENT POSITION, WILL SEEK, TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE,
TO PUT THE BLAME ON US. IT THEREFORE CONTINUES TO BE
IMPORTANT THAT WE REMOVE THOSE ASSETS THAT WE ARE TAKING
OUT OF THAILAND AS PROMPTLY AS POSSIBLE, CONSISTENT WITH
THEIR CONSERVATION.

4. IN RESPONSE TO EXTREME PRESSURE FROM THE THAI PRESS
ACCOMPANIED BY MUCH FLAG-WAVING, KRIANGSAK FEELS IT
ESSENTIAL THAT A MEDIA VISIT TO UTAPAO BE CONDUCTED
TOMORROW (MAY 6). THIS MEDIA VISIT, IN WHICH WE WILL
ALSO INCLUDE FOREIGN PRESS, IS FOR THE PURPOSE OF REPORTING
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THE DEPARTURE OF THE FIRST PLANELOAD OF CAMBODIAN
REFUGEES AT APPROXIMATELY 1100 LOCAL TIME. KRIANGSAK
WISHES MOVEMENT OF THE OUTBOUND VNAF AIRCRAFT TO BE
SUSPENDED DURING THE DURATION OF THE MEDIA VISIT AND WE
AGREE THAT THIS IS A GOOD IDEA.

5. THE PRESS WILL ARRIVE AT UTAPAO AT 0900 LOCAL TIME MAY 6
AND WILL REMAIN FOR APPROXIMATELY THREE HOURS. DURING THAT

TIME, THERE SHOULD BE NO VISIBLE MOVEMENT OR PROCESSING
OF VNAF F-5'S, A-37'S OR OTHER VNAF AIRCRAFT BEING
TAKEN OUT OF THAILAND. PROCESSING CAN BE RESUMED AS
SOON AS THE MEDIA DEPART FROM THE BASE.
MASTERS

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED SECDEF AND CINCPAC.

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